

1 Peter 5:1-5a | “The Responsibility and Reward of an Elder”

*Preached on August 1, 2021 by Pastor Matt Brown*

Please turn in your Bibles to 1 Peter, chapter 5, verses 1 through 5.

It's good to be back with you after a week away.

I very much appreciate Pastor Bob being willing to come back and speak in my absence. *[pause]*

We had a great time last Sunday at the church that I grew up in.

It's always good to see people that you know, and catch up a little bit.

But it's also good to be *home*.

That's what Clearfield and this church is to us: home.

It's where our hearts are and where we serve the Lord with gladness.

You are our family away from our biological families, and I love being your pastor. *[pause]*

It's that topic - pastoring - that arises out of our passage for today.

Let me READ THE TEXT to begin. *[pauseeee]*

Leadership is important.

One of the most common issues that many employees talk about is the management.

That's because good leadership is critical to any organization, especially when facing hardship. *[pause]*

If you see an unhealthy church, most likely you can look to the leaders.

If you see a church that is giving into the pressures of the world, most likely the culprit starts with the leaders. *[pause]*

Many times a church can be encouraged or discouraged based on the behavior of the leadership in a time of crisis.

That's why immediately after talking about the fiery trials that we face, Peter says, “So I exhort the elders among you...”

Peter knows that during times of suffering and persecution, a well-ordered, healthy, and functioning leadership is critical to the whole church body. *[pause]*

So Peter knows that if the church is going to persevere during persecution, he needs to start at the top, the church's leadership. *[pause]*

Now before we go further, what exactly is an “elder”, which Peter talks about here?

An elder is what we typically call a “pastor”.

A pastor has three titles that refer to the same office, but emphasize different aspects of the office.

You see, the title ‘pastor’ actually means ‘shepherd’.

So when you call me “Pastor Matt”, you are essentially calling me “Shepherd Matt”. *[pause]*

Now in our circles, we most often use the term, “pastor”.

But in the Bible, a pastor is also called an elder or an overseer.

So pastor and overseer are more describing the functions of a pastor, while the term elder refers more to who they are. *[pause]*

A clear passage that connects all three is from Acts 20:17, where in talking to the Ephesian elders, Paul also calls them overseers, who shepherd the church of God.

So right in that passage, you have all three titles used for the same position. *[pauseeee]*

Here at First Baptist, we have elders, and we actually have three of them.

I am an elder, and Dave Learish and Ed Catherman are the other elders.

While I am paid to be an elder and focus my full time on that task, Ed and Dave are also elders. *[pause]*

So this passage is very important for me and the other two guys because it tells us exactly what we should be doing and how we should do it.

That’s where the prime application is going to go: to us. *[pause]*

So the text for this morning puts me in an interesting situation, doesn’t it?

I’m preaching to myself primarily, yet if this passage is directed primarily to elders, why is it important for you to even hear it? *[pause]*

Well, the first and most obvious answer is because it’s in the Word of God, and we are called to preach the whole counsel of God.

But additionally, it’s important for you as a church to know because you should know all about elders as well.

You should know how a church should be structured and how it should function.

You should know what *healthy* leadership in a church should look like.

You should know what to look for in an elder and what to expect from us. *[pause]*

It's sad, but there are so many church members who don't know what to even look for when searching for a new pastor or elder.

They end up looking for the wrong things, instead of going back to passages like this one. *[pause]*

It's also sad because there are many church members in churches across the world that have unhealthy leadership in their churches and they don't even realize it.

And what happens is these men aren't held accountable to the Word of God, and they cause terrible damage. *[pause]*

Imagine how many more healthy churches there would be if every church member knew what to look for and what to expect from their leaders, and held them to it.

We need passages like this one to help us function according to what God has set up, and as a result, we will be more healthy and God-glorifying when we do so. *[pause]*

So this morning, don't go into cruise control in your mind and shut your mind off, for this is important for you to know.

And then also near the end, at the beginning of verse 5, there will be an instruction that Peter gives which you will need to heed as well.

So let's get into it, shall we?

*The first point that I want to share this morning is this...*

### **I. An elder should shepherd the flock of God among him. (1-4)**

Pretty basic, right?

Yet Peter includes many descriptors as to how that "shepherding" should be done, which we will unpack. *[pauseeeee]*

As Peter begins exhorting elders, he first identifies with them.

He calls himself a "fellow elder".

Instead of waving around his apostleship card, who they should just listen to, Peter humbly identifies as a fellow elder. *[pause]*

He wants them to know that this exhortation isn't from someone distant from them and their situation, but he wants them to know that he's in this together with them.

He's not asking them to do anything that he hasn't done already.

He has striven as a fellow elder to do exactly what he exhorts them to do. *[pause]*

There's something comforting and relatable when we can hear from someone who is in the same situation that we are in.

We know that they aren't coming from a place of being puffed up, but they are encouraging us, as a fellow laborer, to keep doing what we are called to do. *[pause]*

So he identifies with them in his fellow eldership, but also, he says that he is a witness of Christ's suffering.

It's like he says, "I was there! I saw Christ suffer."

Yet he doesn't stop there, for he shows us that he also shares in the glory to come, for he is a "partaker" in the glory to come. *[pause]*

He encourages these fellow elders that like him, they will also partake of the glory to come when Christ returns.

He brings great comfort and hope to them in their positions of the glory to be revealed.

They are to do their job with an eye towards the glory to come. *[pause]*

So after identifying with the elders, and reminding them of the share they have in the glorious future, he now moves on to the main command that he wants to communicate....

"Shepherd the flock of God that is among you."

An elder and pastor's role can be summed up in that one command: 'shepherd the flock of God'. *[pause]*

God often uses the image of sheep for his people, and that's what he means here when he talks about the flock of God.

The church is the flock of God, and its elders is its shepherds. *[pause]*

This flock is a group, meaning, we were not meant to go at the Christian life alone!

You need to be in the flock: serving, worshipping, encouraging, and being encouraged.

So you need the rest of the flock, but also, you need to be shepherded. *[pause]*

If God didn't see the shepherd as important, why would he emphasize the need for elders to shepherd the flock?

You need to be cared for, protected, and fed - and an elder's role is to do just that. *[pause]*

To 'shepherd' means to do all that a shepherd does.

A shepherd leads, guides, tends, cares, protects, and feeds.

So that is exactly what an elder should do.

They lead and guide the flock in the way that God has directed in Scripture by giving the church direction and solid, godly leadership.

They tend and care to the needs of the sheep by loving them, being there for them, and caring for their souls.

They protect them by making sure that no false doctrine or wolves creep in.

And they feed the sheep by regularly proclaiming God's Word, whether publicly or privately.  
[pause]

This is my role and responsibility, as well as Ed and Dave's.

We ought to be shepherding you in all of what that looks like. [pause]

And we do this for the flock of God.

This is God's flock! You are God's flock!

May we never act like this is *our* flock, but God's! [pauseeee]

Notice also how Peter says, "The flock of God *that is among you*."

We aren't accountable for every single Christian in the world, or even in the United States, or even in Clearfield.

We are accountable for the flock among us here at First Baptist. [pause]

Are you a part of the flock here at First Baptist?

If not, why not join us in membership? If not, why not get more involved? If not, why not come here and be committed to *this* flock?

What a better time than now to join this flock, the flock of God at First Baptist. [pause]

An aspect of church membership is that it helps us as a practical way to determine who is among us and who is not.

Am I accountable for the person who comes off the street and goes here for 1 Sunday? I'm pretty sure we would each say, 'No'.

So membership, serving, and regular commitment helps the elders know who they must shepherd. [pauseeeee]

An elder should shepherd the flock that is among them.

They are what God has set up and uses to tend and care for his sheep, who are in various locations all across the globe. *[pauseeee]*

This command is a continued challenge for me to evaluate my ministry here: am I shepherding the flock?

That is my main role, so your expectations of me should align with that command. *[pause]*

A pastor shouldn't be mainly focused on fixing things around the church building, although they can certainly do that at times.

A pastor shouldn't be focused on entertaining people.

A pastor shouldn't be focused on a million other things to the detriment of their main role.

A pastor should be shepherding the flock of God!

He should be feeding, caring for, guiding, leading, and protecting the flock. *[pause]*

I've heard of pastors that were so involved in the building or finances that it hurt their shepherding.

I've heard of pastors that were so involved in simply running programs that they didn't tend the sheep.

May God grant me the grace to remain focused on shepherding and to not get distracted with many good, yet non-shepherding tasks.

When I'm able to focus and remain faithful in shepherding, that's when I'm shepherding the way that God wants and in the way that you need. *[pause]*

This church has been great to me in this way with your expectations.

You don't expect me to do all of these other things, but rather, you expect me to simply shepherd the flock, and I thank you for that.

That's the way that God has commanded and desires for His church to function. *[pauseeee]*

Yet Peter doesn't stop there, for he expands on this shepherding task and says that elders should shepherd, "exercising oversight". *[pause]*

An important aspect of shepherding is oversight, meaning, you can't do shepherding well without it. *[pause]*

Exercising oversight is why elders can also be called "overseers".

It means to watch over the flock.

It's to oversee the spiritual state of the church, as they are accountable to oversee that everything is going the way that it should. *[pause]*

Oversight involves making sure that no false doctrine is introduced.

Oversight involves making sure that the church is following the Word of God.

It includes watching over the people, and seeing what spiritual needs they may have.

It means that they should watch for any signs of division or disunity, or things of that nature. *[pause]*

It's certainly not a parent-child relationship, but to illustrate it, the idea is sort of like a parent with a young child at a park.

A responsible parent is always vigilant, alert, and watching over their child to make sure that there is no danger and that all is going well, like it should. *[pause]*

It's also kind of like a supervisor at work.

They are responsible for overseeing the company's day-to-day activities, making sure that everything is how it should be.

If something is amiss, they see it, step in, and guide in the right way.

That's an elder's role in the church.

They are mature, godly men overseeing the church, in order to make sure that God's Word is followed in every aspect, and to watch for anyone in the church who is stumbling. *[pause]*

Maybe there's a sheep wandering away from the flock, an elder can see that, and go after them in love.

Maybe there's a sheep who's hurting spiritually, an elder watches for that, and moves in to mend with the healing power of Scripture. *[pause]*

This is a much needed job!

Imagine a church without elders.

There is no one tasked with overseeing things and keeping things in line with Scripture, or keeping an eye on the whole flock.

That's a recipe for disaster.

Other sheep in the flock may see the other sheep around them and help them, but an elder watches over the whole flock and can see things in that perspective. *[pauseeee]*

This Scripture passage is exactly why in our church constitution it says this of the elders of our church...

“The elders...will be the spiritual leaders and have general oversight of the church membership and all aspects of this church and its ministries.”<sup>1</sup>

As you can see, we are simply striving to follow the instructions of Scripture in how we do everything we do as a church. *[pauseeee]*

So Peter gave the elder’s main task: shepherd the flock.

And he gave a critical part of shepherding, which is oversight.

But now he moves from the tasks of an elder to more of the manner and motives that an elder should have. *[pauseeeee]*

He uses three sets of commands, with each having an instruction of what NOT to do, followed directly by an instruction of what TO do, which is the opposite of what he just said. *[pause]*

But before I move into these commands, let me make a side-note.

These are things that an elder should do and not do, but as a sinful person, not any elder is going to do these things perfectly.

Yet these commands should characterize an elder’s life and ministry.

So if an elder sinfully messed up once in a minor way and wasn’t a good example of something, you can’t say, “Look! They need to be removed!”

But rather, as you consider their whole life and ministry in the church, could you characterize their life as, “Yes, they are an example to the flock of a godly person.” *[pauseeee]*

Let’s look at what God says about the manner and motives that an elder should possess or not possess.

First, in verse 2, they should shepherd *with the right heart*.

Peter says to shepherd the flock of God, “not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you.”

An elder should not do his job because he is forced to do it.

He should not do his job because he feels pressure to be an elder by the church or others.

He should not be doing his task out of mere obligation.

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<sup>1</sup> “Constitution & Bylaws of First Baptist Church of Clearfield, PA, Inc.” Section 4.04 Elders.



And also, even the pressures of a tough situation should not compel him to be an elder and shepherd.

An elder should never shepherd because, ‘you know, someone has to do it.’ [pause]

God wants men of God to lead his church, who willingly do it.

He wants men who have the right heart behind serving the flock.

He doesn’t want men who are going to half-heartedly serve out of duty or force, but men who whole-heartedly and willingly step up and lead.

This is what God wants!

This is “as God would have them”. [pause]

Really, this ‘willingness’ follows the pattern of any service or ministry to God.

God wants people to serve him with the right heart.

He wants people, not forced to serve, but willing to serve.

So even for most of you, you aren’t elders, but wherever you serve, do you do it *willingly*?

Or is it more out of duty or because “someone has to do it”? [pauseeee]

So an elder should shepherd with the right heart, but also, an elder should shepherd *with the right motives*.

Peter says they should do it, “not for shameful gain, but eagerly.”

This goes right to the heart of an elder’s motives.

Are they in it for the money, or are they in it because they truly want to?

This has been a common problem among some American pastors.

You see abuses of money pop up all the time, as scandals arise.

You have pastors making millions being a shepherd.

You have elders embezzling money.

You have pastors looking for the next way to make a buck, promoting their personal brand or ministry.

But an elder should not be in ministry for the shameful gain of money! [pause]

‘Shameful gain’ is to covetously and greedily obtain money.

It's that person who is just shamefully greedy.

The way that they go about obtaining or looking for money is just shameful. *[pause]*

Now obviously shameful gain *isn't* desiring to make sure that you financially provide for your family.

But it's more about greedily wanting more and more. *[pauseeee]*

God doesn't want the under-shepherds of his flock to be all about money, but rather to eagerly shepherd.

He wants the elders to shepherd his flock out of the right motives.

They should have an intense desire to WANT TO shepherd the flock among them.

Like, "I want to serve here, I love and am eager to shepherd this group of people."

Not because they are looking to amass a big bank account, but eagerly desiring to care for the flock. *[pause]*

So an elder is a man who loves God's people among him, and eagerly wants to care for them.

He should be a selfless, generous man, not looking for more and more money, but to simply serve the Lord with gladness. *[pauseeee]*

An elder should shepherd with the right heart, the right motives, and thirdly, he should shepherd *in the right way*. *[pause]*

How one shepherds is important to God.

Notice what he says in verse 3, "not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock."

A pastor should not be domineering in his leadership.

The idea of 'domineering' means to dominate the sheep for your own advantage and control.

It's to impose your own will, and lord over people.

This is when elders use their authority for wrong.

They get on a power trip and act superior, so that they start to control every little thing in a mean way.

It's this mentality where they may not say it, but the impression is, "I'm the boss around here. I tell you what to do, and you do it." *[pause]*

You would be shocked to hear some of the stories of domineering that I've heard before concerning pastors.

That's not the way of Christ!

Remember what Jesus said in Mark 10:42-43?

James and John ask Jesus if they can sit on his left and right hand in glory, and Jesus says, "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles *lord it over them*...

...and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant." [pause]

That "lord it over them" word is the same word used here.

He's saying, "That's the way of the world! That's not how you should be, rather you should be servants!"

The leaders of Christ's church are to be humble servants. [pause]

They are not to dominate over the flock, for this flock is simply "those in your charge". [pause]

He's saying, "They're not yours. They are God's flock, who is under your care."

The word used here points to a lot, portion, or share.

It's what is allotted or assigned to you.

A portion of the flock of God is assigned to elders and that flock is under their care.

They are not their own to dominate over, but they are simply stewards of the portion of GOD'S flock allotted to them. [pauseeee]

So the elders shouldn't be domineering, but rather they are to be examples.

Their leadership should be one of exemplary godliness, not excruciating control.

They should lead by example, not by intimidation or authoritarian methods. [pause]

You see, domineering leadership says, "You do what I say."

But leadership by example says, "I'll do it and you can follow my lead." [pause]

God doesn't want high and mighty leaders, who throw around the weight of their authority, but he wants servant-leaders.

Men who are gentle and godly, and who demonstrate great examples to the flock. [pause]

So if we looked at all of these commands about the manner of shepherding that an elder should show, how could we summarize it?

An elder is a godly, humble, selfless man who loves God's people, wants to care for them, and shepherds them well. *[pause]*

An elder is not a CEO of a Fortune 500 company, domineering over people, unwilling to get his hands dirty, and seeking ways to grow his six-figure salary.

This is not a business, this is the church of the Living God! *[pauseeee]*

Elders are not to serve in order to greedily grasp more and more money.

Elders are not to push around the sheep and dominate them with their authority.

Elders are not to serve out of compulsion, but they are to willingly and eagerly shepherd the flock of God as an example to them.

This is the beauty of God's kingdom!

The leaders of his church are supposed to be merely gentle, godly, generous, and humble servant-leaders.

Isn't that kind of leadership amazing and attractive, so much so that you *want* to follow that kind of leadership?

That's because Christ is that kind of leader, and he has created the world to function according to that kind of leadership because that's right in line with His character.

May God help me and the other elders to always strive towards these things as we shepherd you. *[pauseeee]*

That's the responsibilities of elders, but there's also a promised reward for faithful elders.

Peter says, "And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory."

There is a Chief Shepherd, who is over all the under-shepherds of the church, and it's Jesus.

He is the Chief Shepherd, who elders are accountable to.

He leads and is over the whole flock across the world, and his under-shepherds are responsible for the flock that's allotted to them.

And the reward they will receive for faithful shepherding comes when he comes again. *[pauseee]*

This is what godly elders can look forward to.

Though they don't often receive much now, they can look forward and anticipate a reward in the future.

And the reward is a 'crown of glory'.

It's to hear from Christ, "Well done, good and faithful servant."<sup>2</sup>

It will be honor for faithful service when Christ returns, and this honor will never fade away.

Though earthly rewards and praise will vanish, the reward to come will last forever.

It's unfading! *[pause]*

Unlike the temporary, fading crowns of approval from others or financial success in this life, there is the unfading approval from God Himself to come.

There is honor awaiting a faithful elder when Christ comes, as he doesn't overlook his servants' faithfulness.

God will recognize their faithful service, and they will give the praise back to God, casting their crowns at his feet.<sup>3</sup> *[pauseeee]*

God rewards faithful service.

This is what sustains an elder through hard times.

This is what sustains an elder when he never receives any commendation from anyone else.

This is what sustains an elder, though it sometimes feels as though his shepherding is not doing anything. *[pause]*

When the popular pastor whose theology is wrong, methods are unbiblical, and bank account is overflowing looks successful in the world's eyes...

...The faithful pastor serving away among his flock can look to a passage like this with hope and encouragement that he doesn't need all of that...

...For what truly matters is what God thinks, and he can look forward with anticipation to his "crown of glory". *[pause]*

That's the reward of a faithful elder, and it's a glorious reward.

Isn't that amazing?

He doesn't just love us and shower us with grace by sending Jesus to die for our sins and give us eternal life, but he even goes so far as to reward his faithful servants.

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 25:23.

<sup>3</sup> See Revelation 4:10-11.

That's the love and generosity of the Lord! *[pauseeee]*

*So an elder should shepherd the flock of God among him, but also, Peter continues into the beginning of verse 5, by showing us that...*

## **II. An elder should be submitted to, especially by those who are younger. (5a)**

Peter isn't just concerned with the elders role, but also the church's role in regards to the elders, too.

He says, "Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders." *[pause]*

Peter addresses those who are younger here probably because younger people have the biggest temptation to be independent and rebel against those in leadership.

And if he's addressing the group who struggles the most with submission to authority, then it's implied that the rest of the church should also submit.

We can stand pretty firmly on this implication since in Hebrews 13:17 it says to the whole church, "Obey your leaders and submit to them."

That's why I phrased the second point the way that I did.

'An elder should be submitted to, especially by those who are younger.' *[pause]*

But what exactly does this mean?

It means that as a sheep in the flock, you defer to their leadership.

You yield your preferences and desires about the church to the elders, who are called to lead the church.

It's simply being willing to follow and submit to what the leaders say.

Now this isn't *blind submission*, where you just listen no matter what, for if the leaders are going against Scripture, you need to obey Scripture above all.

There should be accountability to the Word of God.

But if they are not going against God's Word, they should be submitted to. *[pause]*

It's having an attitude of voluntarily yielding to their leadership and authority.

It's a general attitude of submission and respect for their spiritual leadership. *[pause]*

The *Holman New Testament Commentary* made a very practical and powerful quote about this, as it said...

“Some church members believe they have a right to sabotage pastoral leadership, to speak critically of pastors, to slander them, to castigate them simply because they don’t like them or their leadership.

God has not given the members of the flock this responsibility.

When they take this upon themselves, they allow Satan to use them as his tool for division and destruction in the church.

The message here is clear: when pastor-shepherds lead their congregation with responsible and godly leadership and members of the flock resist this leadership, those members are in disobedience to the Lord and have opened the door for Satan.”<sup>4</sup> [pause]

Gripping, right?

That’s a good reminder of the importance of verses like this one, and the destruction that can ensue when not followed. [pause]

*Elders should be shepherding well, and be submitted to, and that’s the big idea for this morning...*

**Elders are servants who lead the flock of God, so they should shepherd well and be submitted to in humility.**

That’s what it comes down to this morning.

Elders are servant leaders, who are tasked with a big job: shepherding and overseeing the flock among them.

This takes boldness, conviction, and leadership, but also tenderness and care.

It takes gentleness and generosity, and ultimately, it takes a love for God and for His people. [pause]

When they do this, they are shepherding *well*.

They are shepherding like the Chief Shepherd, who they are accountable to.

And therefore, they should be submitted to out of a love for God and the roles that He has set up. [pauseeee]

When the elders are doing their job rightly, and the flock is responding to their leadership rightly, that’s when you have a healthy church.

That’s the way that God has created His church to function.

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<sup>4</sup> Walls, D., & Anders, M. (1999). I & II Peter, I, II & III John, Jude (Vol. 11, p. 91). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

And that's a church that will persevere through perilous times.